

United States House of Representatives



**Subcommittee on National Security,
Emerging Threats and International Relations**

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**GAO Report Finds Radio Sawa and Alhurra Television
Lack Accurate Measures of Audience Size and Program Credibility**

WASHINGTON, DC—Today the Government Accountability Office (GAO) released a report stating that the Broadcasting Board of Governors' (BBG) broadcasting services, Radio Sawa and Alhurra satellite television networks, lack accurate measures of audience size and program credibility, and have not implemented long-term strategic planning. Collectively known as Middle East Broadcasting Networks (MBN), Radio Sawa and Alhurra television are at the forefront of U.S. public diplomacy efforts in the Middle East and North Africa.

Congressman Christopher Shays (R-CT), Chairman of the Subcommittee on National Security, Emerging Threats and International Relations, who requested the study, today issued a comment on the new GAO report.

“The GAO report raises legitimate concerns about Middle East Broadcasting Networks, Inc. approach to audience research and will serve as an important oversight tool for the Committee,” said Shays. “Radio Sawa and the Alhurra satellite television networks are among the most powerful American public diplomacy tools in the Middle East and North Africa at this critical moment. We recognize the hard work and accomplishments of many in establishing these outlets on a short timetable. However, I share GAO’s concern about the need for strategic planning, thorough oversight and accurate audience research.”

The report, *U.S. International Broadcasting: Management of Middle East Broadcasting Services Could Be Improved*, recognizes MBN’s progress facing competitive challenges in the Middle Eastern media market, but notes key areas that need improvement. GAO found weaknesses in the way MBN surveyed and recorded measurements of audience size and credibility, in effect stating there is no clear evidence for how well these public diplomacy news outlets are performing. In addition, MBN lacks regular editorial

training; does not use regularly review its programming for standards or alignment with mission; and thus far has held only one annual review for Radio Sawa and none for Alhurra television.

GAO recommended strategic planning to address competition in the regional media market, implementing stronger and more comprehensive internal controls, conducting regular program reviews, and addressing weaknesses in audience research methods and reporting.